

similar work are postal clerks and mail carriers; route drivers; traffic, shipping, and receiving clerks; and parcel post clerks.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service. Persons interested in mail clerk and messenger jobs may also contact messenger and courier services, mail order firms, banks, printing and publishing firms, utility companies, retail stores, or other large firms.

For information on training and certification programs in mail systems management, contact:

✉ Mail Systems Management Association, J.A.F. Building, P.O. Box 2155, New York, NY 10116-2155. Internet: <http://www.msma.com>

Material Recording, Scheduling, Dispatching, and Distributing Occupations

Significant Points

- Slower than average job growth is expected as additional automation increases worker productivity.
- Many of these occupations are entry level and do not require more than a high school diploma.

Nature of the Work

Workers in this group are responsible for a variety of communications, recordkeeping, and scheduling operations. Typically, they coordinate, expedite, and track orders for personnel, materials, and equipment.

Dispatchers receive requests for service and initiate action to provide that service. Duties vary, depending on the needs of the employer. Police, fire, and ambulance dispatchers, also called public safety dispatchers, handle calls from people reporting crimes, fires, and medical emergencies. Truck, bus, and train dispatchers schedule and coordinate the movement of these vehicles to ensure they arrive on schedule. Taxicab dispatchers relay requests for cabs to individual drivers, tow truck dispatchers take calls for emergency road service, and utility company dispatchers handle calls related to utility and telephone service.

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks track all incoming and outgoing shipments of goods transferred between businesses, suppliers, and customers. These clerks may be required to lift cartons of various sizes. Shipping clerks assemble, address, stamp, and ship merchandise or materials. Receiving clerks unpack, verify, and record incoming merchandise. In a small company, one clerk may perform all of these tasks. Traffic clerks record destination, weight, and charge of all incoming and outgoing shipments.

Stock clerks receive, unpack, and store materials and equipment, and maintain and distribute inventories. Inventories may be merchandise in wholesale and retail establishments, or equipment, supplies, or materials in other kinds of organizations. In small firms, stock clerks may perform all of the above tasks, as well as those usually handled by shipping and receiving clerks. In large establishments, they may be responsible only for one task.

(This introductory statement is followed by statements that provide more detail on dispatchers; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; and stock clerks.)

Other administrative support occupations in this group include *production, planning, and expediting clerks*—who coordinate and expedite the flow of work and material according to production schedules; *procurement clerks*—who draw up purchase orders to obtain merchandise or material; *weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers*—who weigh, measure, and check materials; and *utility meter readers*—who read electric, gas, water, or steam meters and record the quantity used.

Working Conditions

Working conditions vary considerably by occupation and employment setting. Meter readers, for example, spend a good portion of their workday traveling around communities and neighborhoods taking readings, either directly or with remote reading equipment. The work of dispatchers can be very hectic when many calls come in at the same time. The job of public safety dispatcher is particularly stressful, because slow or improper response to a call can result in serious injury or further harm. Also, callers who are anxious or afraid may become excited and be unable to provide needed information; some may become abusive. Despite provocations, dispatchers must remain calm, objective, and in control of the situation.

Dispatchers sit for long periods, using telephones, computers, and two-way radios. Much of their time is spent at video display terminals, viewing monitors and observing traffic patterns. As a result of working for long stretches with computers and other electronic equipment, dispatchers can experience significant eyestrain and back discomfort. Generally, dispatchers work a 40-hour week; however, rotating shifts and compressed work schedules are common. Alternative work schedules are necessary to accommodate evening, weekend, and holiday work, as well as 24-hours-per-day, seven-days-per-week operations.

Shipping, receiving, traffic, and stock clerks work in a wide variety of businesses, institutions, and industries. Some work in warehouses, stock rooms, or in shipping and receiving rooms that may not be temperature controlled. Others may spend time in cold storage rooms or outside on loading platforms, where they are exposed to the weather. Most jobs involve frequent standing, bending, walking, and stretching. Some lifting and carrying of smaller items may also be involved. Although automation, robotics, and pneumatic devices have lessened the physical demands in this occupation, their use remains somewhat limited. Work still can be strenuous, even though mechanical material handling equipment is employed to move heavy items. The typical workweek is Monday through Friday; however, evening and weekend hours are standard for some jobs, such as stock clerks who work in retail trade, and may be required in others when large shipments are involved or when inventory is taken.

Employment

In 1998, material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers held about 4 million jobs. Employment was distributed among the detailed occupations as follows:

Stock clerks	2,300,000
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks	774,000
Production, planning, and expediting clerks	248,000
Dispatchers	248,000
Procurement clerks	58,000
Weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers	51,000
Meter readers, utilities	50,000
All other material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers	196,000

About 7 out of 10 material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing jobs were in services or wholesale and retail trade. Although these workers are found throughout the country, most work near population centers where retail stores, warehouses, factories, and large communications centers are concentrated.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Many material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations are entry level and do not require more than a high school diploma. Employers, however, increasingly prefer to hire those familiar with computers and other electronic office and business equipment. Those who have taken business courses or have previous business, dispatching, or specific job-related experience may be preferred. Because the nature of the work is to communicate effectively with other people, good oral and written communications

skills are essential. Typing, filing, recordkeeping, and other clerical skills are also important.

State or local government civil service regulations usually govern police, fire, emergency medical, and ambulance dispatching jobs. Candidates for these positions may have to pass written, oral, and performance tests. Also, they may be asked to attend training classes and attain the proper certification in order to qualify for advancement.

Trainees usually develop the necessary skills on the job. This informal training lasts from several days to a few months, depending on the complexity of the job. Dispatchers usually require the most extensive training. Working with an experienced dispatcher, they monitor calls and learn how to operate a variety of communications equipment, including telephones, radios, and wireless appliances. As trainees gain confidence, they begin to handle calls themselves. Many public safety dispatchers also participate in structured training programs sponsored by their employer. Some employers offer a course designed by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials. This course covers topics such as interpersonal communications; overview of the police, fire, and rescue functions; modern public safety telecommunications systems; basic radio broadcasting; local, State, and national crime information computer systems; and telephone complaint/report processing procedures. Other employers develop in-house programs based on their own needs. Emergency medical dispatchers often receive special training or have special skills. Increasingly, public safety dispatchers receive training in stress and crisis management, as well as family counseling. Employers are recognizing the toll this work has on daily living and the potential impact stress has on the job, on the work environment, and in the home.

Communications skills and the ability to work under pressure are important personal qualities for dispatchers. Residency in the city or county of employment frequently is required for public safety dispatchers. Dispatchers in transportation industries must be able to deal with sudden influxes of shipments and disruptions of shipping schedules caused by bad weather, road construction, or accidents.

Although there are no mandatory licensing or certification requirements, some States require that public safety dispatchers possess a certificate to work on a State network, such as the Police Information Network. The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, the National Academy of Emergency Medical Dispatch, and the International Municipal Signal Association all offer certification programs. Many dispatchers participate in these programs in order to improve their prospects for career advancement.

Stock clerks and shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks usually learn the job by doing routine tasks under close supervision. They learn how to count and mark stock, and then start keeping records and taking inventory. Strength, stamina, good eyesight, and an ability to work at repetitive tasks, sometimes under pressure, are important characteristics. Stock clerks, whose sole responsibility is to bring merchandise to the sales floor, stock shelves and racks, need little or no training. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks and stock clerks who handle jewelry, liquor, or drugs may be bonded.

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks start out by checking items to be shipped and then attaching labels and making sure the addresses are correct. Training in the use of automated equipment is usually done informally, on the job. As these occupations become more automated, however, workers in these jobs may need longer training in order to master the use of the equipment.

Advancement opportunities for material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers vary with the place of employment. Dispatchers who work for private firms, which are usually small, will find few opportunities for advancement. Public safety dispatchers, on the other hand, may become a shift or divisional supervisor or chief of communications, or move to higher paying administrative jobs. Some go on to become police officers or firefighters. In large firms, stock clerks can advance to invoice clerk, stock control clerk, or procurement clerk. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks are promoted to head clerk and those with a broad understanding of shipping

and receiving may enter a related field such as industrial traffic management. With additional training, some stock clerks and shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks advance to jobs as warehouse manager or purchasing agent.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing workers is expected to grow more slowly than the average for all occupations through 2008. However, projected employment growth varies by detailed occupation. Employment of stock clerks, for example, will be affected by increased automation. New technologies will enable clerks to handle more stock, thus holding down employment growth. The effect of automation also will tend to restrict potential employment growth among shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks. Automation in warehouses and stockrooms plus other productivity improvements will enable these clerks to handle materials more efficiently and more accurately than before. Overall employment of dispatchers, on the other hand, is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. While employment of public safety dispatchers is expected to grow more slowly than average as governments endeavor to combine dispatching services across governmental units and across governmental jurisdictions, average growth is expected among dispatchers not involved in public safety.

Because employment in material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations is substantial, workers who leave the labor force or transfer to other occupations are expected to create many job openings each year.

Earnings

Earnings of material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations vary somewhat by occupation and industry. The range of median hourly earnings in 1998 are shown in the following tabulation.

Production, planning, and expediting clerks	\$14.07
Dispatchers, except police, fire, and ambulance	12.68
Meter readers, utilities	12.20
Dispatchers, police, fire, and ambulance	11.38
Procurement clerks	10.88
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks	10.82
Weighers, measurers, checkers, and samplers, recordkeeping	10.72
Stock clerks and order fillers	7.94
All other material recording, scheduling, and distribution workers	10.13

Workers in material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations usually receive the same benefits as most other workers. If uniforms are required, employers usually either provide the uniforms, or an allowance to purchase them.

Dispatchers

(O*NET 58002 and 58005)

Nature of the Work

The work of dispatchers varies greatly depending on the industry. Dispatchers keep records, logs, and schedules of the calls they receive, transportation vehicles they monitor and control, and actions they take. They maintain information on each call and then prepare a detailed report on all activities occurring during the shift. Many dispatchers employ computer-aided dispatch systems to accomplish these tasks.

Regardless of where they work, all dispatchers are assigned a specific territory and have responsibility for all communications within this area. Many work in teams, especially in large communications centers or companies. One person usually handles all dispatching calls to the response units or company's drivers, while the other members of the team usually receive the incoming calls and deal with the public.